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## ICC SETS TWO NEW FORUMS ON 618 AREA CODE

The Illinois Commerce Commission has announced two additional public forums on the 618 area code will be held in Belleville and Vandalia later this month.

A public forum to receive comments on how a new area code should be added to the 618 area, when needed, will begin at 7 p.m. Monday, March 25 at Belleville City Hall, 101 S. Illinois Street, Belleville; and at 7 p.m. Thursday, March 28 in Vandalia City Hall, 219 S. 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Vandalia.

An administrative law judge's recommendation for an overlay of a new code over the current 618 area is being considered by the Commission. In an overlay only customers seeking a new or additional telephone line would be assigned a number with the new area code, while other customers would continue to use the 618 area code as part of their telephone number. ICC Commissioners also have indicated they would like public comment on a geographic split of the 618 area code, in which the area would be divided with customers in one part receiving a new area code, while customers in the other area would retain the 618 area code.

The Commission is anticipating implementation of a number conservation effort called pooling early this summer, which could assist in conserving unassigned numbers in the 618 area and forestall the need for a new area code indefinitely. In number pooling, telecommunications companies are asked to return unused blocks of numbers. The blocks are reassigned by, Neustar, the national number administrator, in smaller increments of 1,000 numbers, as needed.

A final Commission decision on the 618 area code remedy is expected later this spring.

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